

Individual Placement and Support (IPS) Coming to Rio Hondo's Wellness Center

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On June 8, 2016, fifty-four consumers and staff attended the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) Employment Pilot Project Kick-off event at the LACDMH Rio Hondo Mental Health Center in Cerritos, CA. This kick-off celebrated the upcoming IPS Supported Employment Program coming to Rio Hondo on July 1, 2016. It was a fun-filled event with food, prizes, giveaways and inspirational speakers, attended by consumers and staff alike from Rio Hondo Mental Health Center. The event was also attended by other employment related agencies such as the Work Incentive Planning and Assistance (WIPA) Program and the Cerritos One-Stop WorkSource Program, SELACO.

IPS, an evidence-based practice, is known as the most effective model for assisting consumers with severe and persistent mental illness obtain and maintain competitive employment. The model uses a team approach to assist consumers/clients with severe mental disorders to obtain a competitive job based on their preference. Participants are offered intensive, field-based services by employment specialists who have a maximum caseload of 20 clients and must provide at least 65% of their services in the field.

In addition to assisting consumers find employment, the IPS pilot project has partnered with the UCLA Center for Neurocognition and Emotion to develop a unique cognitive remediation treatment intervention called the "Wise Worker Program: Developing the Cognitive Skills and Social Wisdom to Succeed in the Workplace." The Wise Worker Program combines computer-based neurocognitive exercises with a structured 24-week Bridging Group to help consumers improve their thinking skills related to employment to help boost their success in the workplace. Cognitive exercises in the Bridging Group include topics such as being flexible with others in the workplace, perspective taking at work, and workplace culture.

Adele Kelso, L.C.S.W., the Program Head at Rio Hondo, welcomed everyone and began the kick-off event with an inspirational speech explaining the Rio Hondo Wellness Center's commitment to employment. She stated that consumers in the IPS program would be helped in their effort to locate a job and would be provided ongoing support from Rio Hondo as long as they needed it. Next, Ms. Kelso introduced Linda Stone-Abrams, L.C.S.W. from Adult System of Care (ASOC), who is the author of the Wise

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Worker Program treatment manual and will be the clinical lead in the pilot project. Ms. Stone-Abrams gave an overview of the pilot project and went over the eight principles of IPS Supported Employment:

1. Competitive employment is the goal
2. Integration of IPS supported employment with mental health treatment
3. Zero Exclusion
4. Consumer preferences are honored
5. Benefits planning
6. Rapid job search
7. Systematic job development and follow-along supports
8. Time-unlimited support.



Adele Kelso, LCSW, Program Head at Rio Hondo Mental Health Center giving her opening remarks.

Kecia Coker, OTD, OTR/L speaking for Countywide Housing, Employment, and Education Resource Development (CHEERD), talked about how employment is tied to health and recovery. Everyone gets the opportunity to get a new identity and become a role model for others. "The first job someone gets," Dr. Coker remarked, "does not have to be their last job... And, when someone gets fired, it does not mean it is the end of the world."

Edward Armstrong, Psy.D., spoke on behalf of CalWORKS and gave the audience some interesting employment statistics. CalWORKS implemented IPS in 2012 and prior to implementation, only 23% of clients were successful at getting a job. However, when CalWORKS began using IPS, their employment rates went up as high as 51%, highlighting the remarkable results possible with this evidence-based model for supported employment. Dr. Armstrong commented, "Consumer preferences are what

CalWORKS staff strives for. Clients come to know that employment specialists advocate for their success...Our program promotes recovery and supports clients in their progress toward employment.”



Edward Armstrong, PsyD, speaking about IPS implementation and employment rates in CalWORKS.

Satoia McClelland, a Community Work Incentive Coordinator from the WIPA program, spoke next. Ms. McClelland spoke about how clients can work and still keep their benefits. The WIPA program offers individualized benefits counseling which is an important component of the IPS model.

The last three speakers spoke about their personal experiences with employment and cognitive remediation. First, Jason G. shared about his past experiences as a consumer in recovery and his history of incarceration. He talked about how an assessment deemed him only marginally employable. “They said one day I might be able to wield a hammer.” Today, Jason is an employment specialist for Project Return, assisting other consumers in their journey to employment.

Next, Walter J. and Angela L., both Wellness Outreach Worker (WOW) volunteers from Arcadia Mental Health Center, talked about their experiences with cognitive remediation interventions. Walter shared how cognitive training helped him succeed after being homeless, struggling with symptoms, unable to hold a conversation with anyone. And, here was Walter speaking to a packed room full of mental health staff and other consumers. Angela also self-disclosed that she had struggled and suffered from the symptoms of Schizophrenia since age 4, unable to express herself emotionally. However, after she decided to sign up for a cognitive remediation program, she soon found that she was able to think more clearly and to better express those emotions she previously found so challenging.

Employment is an important part of the recovery process. Often times it is thought that consumers of mental health services need to be symptom-free in order to be successful in finding a job and keeping it. The IPS model only needs them to have the desire to work; the supportive employment team along with the rest of the consumer’s treatment team will do the rest. With its zero exclusion policy and follow-along support that only ends when the consumer decides to terminate support services, IPS combined with the

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innovative Wise Worker Program aims to increase employment rates at Rio Hondo's Wellness Center. The LACDMH Adult System of Care is excited for the implementation of this pilot program on July 1, 2016.



Front: Walter J.; Victoria Lee, PhD, ASOC Supervising Psychologist; Connie Gonzalez, Rio Hondo Wellness Center Employment Specialist; Angela L.; Linda Stone-Abrams, LCSW, IPS Clinical Lead; Edward Armstrong, PsyD, CalWORKS Supervising Psychologist. Back: Satoia McClelland, Community Work Incentive Coordinator from WIPA; Jason G.; Kecia Coker, OTD, OTR/L, CHEERD Employment & Education Supervisor; Adele Kelso, LCSW, Rio Hondo Program Head.